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ABSTRACT

The monograph by the National Association for Retarded Citizens (NARC) examines issues relevant to the involvement of low income and minority groups in mental retardation programs. It is stressed that a child in a low income family is more likely to be retarded than a child from a higher income family and that this interrelationship perpetuates a cycle of poverty. Previous experience is said to have taught that traditional enlistment approaches discourage participation in ARC programs by low income groups. Emphasized is the need to find out what low income residents desire in mental retardation programs. Provided are sociological facts and statistics from the federal poverty guidelines useful for persons dealing with low income families. Suggested are ways to contact families through churches, schools, clinics, recreation areas, and social agencies. Contacts are seen to serve as bridges between local ARC chapters and the poor. Recommended are local ARC projects such as providing a service not previously available to demonstrate ARC effectiveness in dealing with problems of low income families. Suggestions for involving low income members in ARC chapters include helping meet transportation needs and simplifying parliamentary procedure at meetings. Encouraged is the participation of youth in ARC chapters. A major function of ARC is thought to be service as a catalyst to broaden existing services to the retarded. (DB)

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PLAN FOR EVERYONE

The involvement of low income and minority members.

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December, 1973

The NARC Poverty and Mental Retardation Committee
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About Our Contributors

Zeta Tau Alpha, in seeking the highest ideals in fraternity experience, has always fostered a deep concern for the welfare of those other than our own members. This represents a tangible expression of the purpose to which we are dedicated and which is embodied in our Creed ". . . to think in terms of all mankind and our service in the world. . . ."

Zeta Tau Alpha is an organization of college women with undergraduate and alumnae chapters throughout the United States and Canada. Philanthropic work is an important activity in all our alumnae groups, and each college chapter has a project on the local level to strengthen its service ties to the community. Sincere appreciation is here extended to the thousands of members for their gifts of time and money to make this possible.

In supplying the National Association for Retarded Citizens with a grant of funds to underwrite the publication of this handbook, we are broadening our field of service with the devout hope that by making this information available, some problems caused by unmet needs in the field of retardation will be alleviated. We are grateful to NARC for giving us the opportunity to serve in this manner.

Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity for Women
Mrs. Anne Redmond
National Honorary Chairman

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Introduction: From Planning to Action

Poverty Guidelines

On February 8, 1973, the National Poverty Conference of the National Association for Retarded Citizens got underway in Dallas, Texas. This was a working conference. People came to get things done. They came to develop workable guidelines that would turn words, ideals and resolutions into action programs. Their goals were threefold: (1) to increase the participation of low-income people within the ARC, (2) to improve services for the mentally retarded in low-income areas and (3) to attack the causal conditions which lead to poverty and often to mental retardation.

If those in attendance were dedicated to action, they were also realistic. They realized all too well that while the ARC movement has proven to be a potent tool for obtaining needed services in many areas, it has failed to meet its objectives with low-income groups. Why? Not through lack of interest, certainly, or a willingness to serve. For nearly a quarter of a century the ARC movement has shown that it can meet the challenges of the times. Its member units have made deep and lasting inroads into the problem of mental retardation and the mentally retarded.

The answer, then, lay not in lack of motivation or conviction, but in a failure to fully understand the real needs of low-income persons and the low-income mentally retarded. What are the best ways to approach low-income families, meet them, and involve them in the ARC movement? These, and other questions, it was felt, must be answered before ARC members could confidently commit themselves to the problem.

Conference members represented varied walks of life, and many geographic areas of the country. In addition to the Work Group Sessions — the heart of the conference — there were panels and general sessions on varied topics, such as "Life Styles of the Poor and Their Perceptions of the ARC," and "Community Organization Styles." Conference speakers helped shed a great deal of light on the subject of poverty and mental retardation. From Jack Kirkland, Associate Director, Black Studies Institute and Assistant Professor of Social Work, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri:

> "The kind of questions that organizations such as yours raise is 'why is it that the poor white, Blacks, Chicanos and native Americans really won't come to share in and participate in our programs, and won't be members of our groups? Well, why is this? It seems to me that the middle class people who run most organizations are always asking the same question — until they are absolved of any guilt and conclude the problem is one of communication. . . . For too long, we've called the poor 'hard to reach.' But the corollary to that, from the perspective of the poor, is that **you** are hard to take, difficult to swallow, and impossible to digest. . . . In other words, the poor say that middle class people are talking to themselves — dealing with your own questions and answers. . . ."

And from Dorothy Harrison MSW, Associate Professor, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, St. Louis, Missouri:

> "We don't seem to understand that the problem is not with these poor people, these people who don't speak

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the same way we do . . . why do we want to do psychosurgery on **them,** and not on conditions such as poor housing, poor schools, lack of employment, and mental retardation? . . . .

"Poor people are hard to reach. We don't know what to say to them once we get to them. And that's bad. Don't say **anything.** Let them talk to you. . . ."

And from Mr. Kirkland again:

"It seems rather ironic to me that the majority of the people . . . who receive direct services in regard to mental retardation, are the poor people you're trying to reach. And yet, these people are not highly represented in your movement, or your organization. . . "

Dr. Philip Roos, Executive Director of the National Association for Retarded Citizens, further stated the problem that faces the ARC movement:

"In this society, we are raised on fairy tales. Many of us as children were put to bed with the words, 'and they lived happily ever after.' We have developed a faith in the magic of words, a faith in the potency of good intentions, but life is not a fairy tale. With regard to rhetoric, we have had resolutions, but we have **not** had results . . . the goal of this conference is specific and clear. It is to translate our rhetoric, to translate our resolutions, into results. The time for action is now. . . ."

Clearly, from such statements as these, we have a challenging task ahead of us. We must work to overcome a great many obstacles, prejudices and misconceptions. We must understand that before we can realistically expect low-income persons to become involved in the ARC movement, we must demonstrate our own involvement.

We have met many challenges before. And, while greater obstacles face us than any we have met in the past, we have the opportunity to achieve far greater benefits for the mentally retarded than we have ever imagined.

We are not without weapons in this fight. We have the know-how, experience and a dedicated membership. And, while only the **individual unit** can achieve results in its local area, both the national and state Associations are available as resource points. It is time to turn planning into action.

The purpose of this publication is to outline specific steps that you and your ARC can take to bring about that involvement. The information compiled here is a result of concepts developed at the National Poverty Conference, and other data pertinent to meeting the needs of mentally retarded persons in low-income areas.

Hopefully these guidelines will prove to be more than a report on poverty and mental retardation. They were designed to serve as a launching point for ARC action. They **can** serve that purpose — if you and your ARC will decide to totally commit yourselves to this need.

Though this report deals generally with the urban poor, the techniques also apply to rural areas. Attention will be given to other program techniques in rural areas.

I. Mental Retardation and the Low-income Family

A child in a low-income family is fifteen times more likely to be diagnosed as retarded than is a child from a higher income family. Mental retardation caused and perpetuated by environmental factors is not confined to big city ghettos, it strikes in large towns, small towns, and rural communities. In 1967, a Report by the "President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty" states:

"It may surprise most Americans to know that there is more poverty in rural America, proportionately, than in our cities. In metropolitan areas, one person in eight is poor, and in the suburbs, the ratio is one in 15. But in the rural area one of every four persons is poor, with a total of 14 million people."

Antipoverty programs have bypassed the rural poor. Poverty in rural areas is not as apparent as urban poverty and there are fewer spokesmen for bringing attention to their problems. The continuing stream of the rural poor to the central cities suggests that conditions there are better than in blighted rural areas. The danger is that programs limited to the needs of our central cities will be self-defeating. Unless comparable improvements are made in rural areas, additional incentives will be created for migration to the cities. Therefore, in the future, the special housing, education, employment and other special programs for the central cities may lead to increased migration, thereby complicating the very problems we are trying to solve.

Why? There are many factors that account for the disproportionately high incidence of mental retardation among low-income groups. It's clear that poverty **does** increase the risks of mental retardation, whether it be environmental, organic or genetic.

It should be noted, that although genetically transmitted types of retardation **are** found among low-income families, retardation associated with environmental hazards, inadequate health care and congenital disorders among this group greatly exceeds the average for all other socioeconomic groups. In addition, social and psychological factors contribute to mental retardation, such as unwanted pregnancies.

Malnutrition is one cause of mental retardation among low-income families. If a child doesn't have the right foods during certain critical periods of development, he stands a good chance of being both physically and mentally impaired. Very simply, malnutrition can cause permanent — and irreversible — retardation. A proper diet **later** in life won't help.

Additionally, malnutrition among expectant mothers can impede their abilities to develop the healthy reproductive capacity needed to conceive and nurture a healthy child. Improper nutrition — lack of protein, vitamins, minerals, etc., during the prenatal and early developmental stages have an adverse effect on the development of strong organs. Poor nutrition also contributes to lethargy, dullness, and lack of concentration. Among the impairments that can permanently impair the child are: reduced learning ability and irreversible mental retardation.

A large number of low-income mothers having babies in public hospitals do **not** receive prenatal care. Those mothers who do see a physician are often unaware of the importance of his instructions — on subjects such as diet, for instance. Most often, too, they lack the resources to carry out such instructions.

Another effect of poor prenatal care is a high incidence of premature births. Mental and physical disorders are significantly greater here than among full-term babies.

Lead poisoning is still a hazard in many slum area dwellings — particularly in large cities where in many it has reached epidemic proportions. An alarming number of young children, especially those in the eighteen-month to five-year group, are poisoned each year by the lead-bearing paint chips on flaking ghetto walls. Accumulation of lead in a child's body can too quickly reach a toxic level. If the condition goes untreated, poisoning can result in mental retardation.

Elimination of such a known hazard should be a simple matter. Unfortunately, many helpful measures have been frequently blocked by complex social, educational, economic and political factors.

Mental Retardation — One Aspect of a Greater Problem

Malnutrition, poor medical care and lead poisoning are known preventable causes of mental retardation. There are, however, more nebulous, indirect — but no less dangerous — areas of concern. While it would be difficult to statistically isolate the number of children affected, **it is clear that the accouterments of poverty nurture and encourage mental retardation.**

Survival comes first when you're a person of low-income. Families without proper food, clothing and shelter are hindered from offering their children a full range of social and intellectual stimulation. Many children in disadvantaged areas simply aren't exposed to the most common day-to-day experiences of more fortunate youngsters. During the years from birth to six — critical years in a child's intellectual development — children in low-income areas lack the environmental stimuli that help build young minds. Research now suggests that such **understimulation** can result in irreparable damage — and serve as a cause of mental retardation.

Health Hazards

In low-income areas, poor health is something you learn to live with. Faulty maintenance, crowded living, and inadequate washing and toilet facilities are commonplace in low-income neighborhoods —

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and so is the incidence of both infectious and non-infectious diseases. Such diseases — plus injuries resulting from poor health and hazardous living conditions — can be additional causes of mental retardation.

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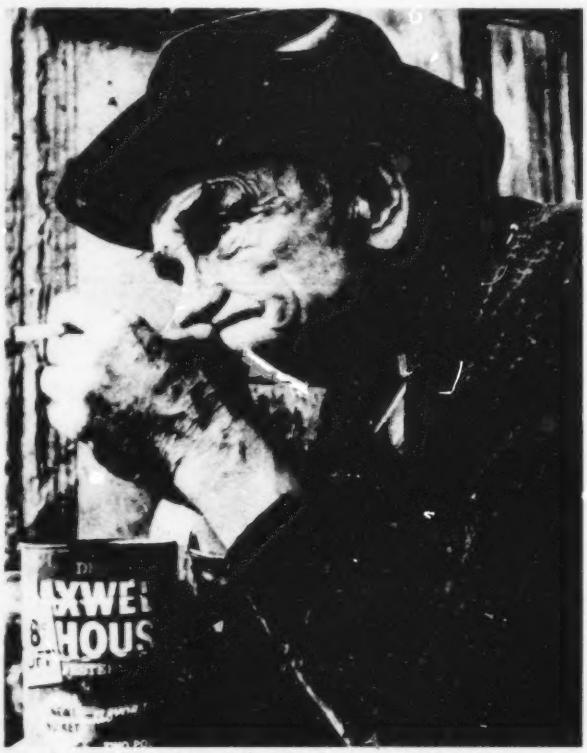
Isolation

People who need help the most are often those who are virtually cut off from outside aid. Mentally retarded persons and their families in low-income areas are frequently deprived of essential health, educational and social services. Typically, such services are located outside the low-income neighborhood, making them almost inaccessible to those who need them.

There are other problems, too. The economically deprived family often views service agency personnel

as apathetic outsiders. This gap between the "outside" and the "inside" is where much of the problem lies — and low-income persons lack an effective voice to change the way services are provided.



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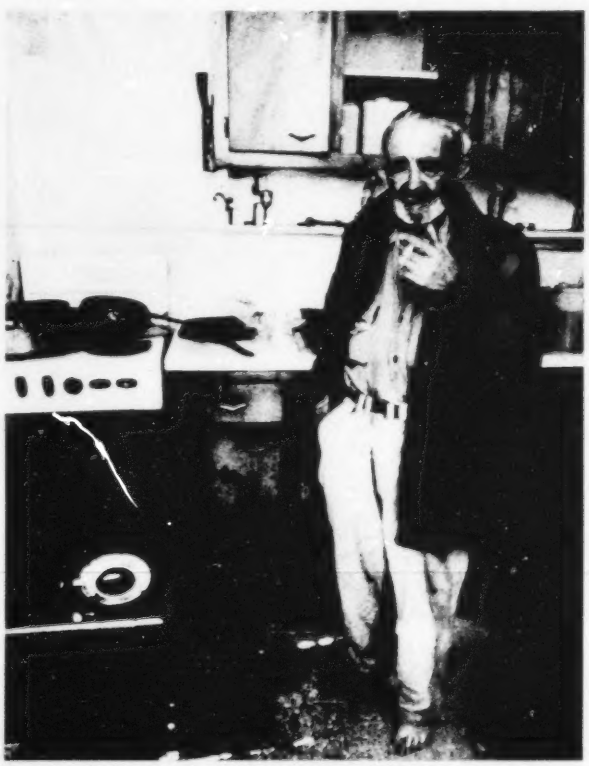

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The Poverty Cycle

Mental retardation, then, in this respect, is a by-product of poverty. **It is impossible to consider — or attack — the problem of mental retardation in low-income areas without considering the problem of poverty.** The two go hand in hand. Poverty promotes retardation and limits a family's ability to deal with it. Low-income families are generally so overwhelmed with the problems of housing, heat, clothing and food that mental retardation is not a priority from the family's point of view. It cannot be . . . .

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Once a family is enmeshed in the cycle of poverty, it is difficult to escape. Very simply, "one thing leads to another," and the low-income family may often create new generations of persons socially, educationally and economically suited to continuing "the tradition of poverty." A man with little or no education will not be able to find a suitable job to earn the money to feed his family and give them proper food, housing and clothing. Therefore, he will **remain** on the cycle of poverty and he will plant the seeds of future deprivation.

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Poverty is a self-perpetuating condition which leads to self-defeating values. The low-income man spends his life on a treadmill. He feels he is going

nowhere, but he cannot stop running — and nothing in his life has prepared him for getting off. . . .

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Attacking the problem

It is clear that we must become increasingly aware of the many diverse factors associated with poverty which can cause or nurture mental retardation. We must understand that since the poverty/mental retardation problem is multi-faceted, our attack must be aimed at many levels — directly, "in the streets" where mental retardation lives; in rural areas where it may seem hidden; at the agency and community levels, where we can **initiate** and **encourage** needed action programs; and at the state and national levels, where effective legislative activity can be promoted to benefit the p or and the mentally retarded both directly and indirectly.

Our fight against mental retardation in the low-income area is, in many ways, paradoxical. We know a great deal about mental retardation. We have exhaustive data on poverty, and we know much about the relationships between poverty and mental retardation. We are well informed on the problems — but we have fallen short on solutions. It is important, then, to discuss approaches that have **not** been overly successful, and to explore those methods or techniques which can help us reach our goals.

II. Learning from Experience

Unfortunately, we have often asked ourselves the question: "why have low-income persons failed **us**?" Why have **they** failed to respond to our efforts to help? Most of us now realize that such questions are, in the vernacular, "cop outs" for failure to accomplish our goals. Have we asked a low-income person how we can be most effective in their community? Since much of our efforts in the low-income areas have been associated with membership, the following reflects comments and reactions in that field. However, it can be assumed that they apply to other contacts with low-income persons as well.

Approaches That "Turn Off" the Low-income Family

1. As will be discussed in a later section, too often ARC members have assumed that traditional methods of enlisting prospective members are suitable for use in poverty areas. A study of the life styles, needs, and backgrounds of low-income persons show that other approach techniques are needed. Both the attitude and understanding of the ARC member are important here. The approach can be neither too personal, nor too impersonal; too vague nor too specific. Low-income persons are wary of promises.

2. We have often made the mistake of pressing for membership too soon. Before we can convince persons in low-income areas that their participation in the Association will be beneficial to both themselves and the ARC, we must first **prove** to them that the ARC itself is a worthwhile, sincere organization.

3. Needless to say, approaching the family with the idea that we "need low-income people in the Association" does little to increase their confidence in our motives. Low-income people know their financial situation and don't want to be reminded by an outsider.

4. Both needs and life styles in low-income areas differ considerably from those in middle-class communities. Where the struggle for survival is near all-consuming, many things we take for granted — free time, transportation, etc., become insurmountable obstacles. Therefore, membership contingent upon attendance at meetings in "establishment" neighborhoods or distant locations can cause low-income persons to lose interest quickly. Additionally, when an ARC member promises to arrange transportation — and doesn't — the prospective member will most likely decide he has simply experienced one more example of middle-class lack of interest.

5. The ARC meeting itself may often "turn off" low-income participants. Persons from low-income areas have become sensitively attuned to condescending, patronizing or pious attitudes. They are not unaccustomed to false friendship, rejection and talk without action. Such attitudes, in conjunction

with a structured meeting and a lack of stimulating programs will generally reinforce the low-income person's attitude of "establishment" organizations. (Additional data on ARC meetings will be covered in a later section.)

These are a few of the mistakes you'll want to avoid in your efforts to help low-income persons gain their confidence and bring them into the ARC movement. In a later section, we'll take a closer look at some of the ways we can remedy this situation.

In the past, the problem of "measurable results" has frequently hampered an ARC's efforts. It is only natural to want visible yardsticks of success. A sense of accomplishment encourages the membership toward further gains. We must learn to expect small successes at first. In the beginning, the ARC unit may not be able to point to "statistical gains." Still, if the membership understands the magnitude of the problem at the beginning of its involvement, and is truly committed to its goals, they will realize, and understand, that we must crawl before we walk. We should, then, learn to **celebrate** our small victories — and **plan** for greater ones . . .

Gaining Some Answers

Cases of need are sometimes screened out because they do not appear to have any direct relationship to "easily understood" or "recognizable" problems of mental retardation. As discussed, it is impossible to isolate the numerous aspects of the Poverty Circle. Lack of education means fewer job skills, which leads to poor housing, disease, mental retardation, etc.

It is not one problem it is many . . .
It is not many problems, it is one . . .

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And if our organization or any other is to properly help low-income persons, and offer them the opportunity to involve themselves actively in finding solutions to their problems, we **must** fully understand that there are many points on the circle of poverty — and that each point is irrevocably related to the others. Often, it is easier **not** to serve low-income persons — or to serve them in a general, impersonal manner from afar. But our movement has not flourished by serving from afar.

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We must take a good, hard look at our priorities and goals. We must determine whether or not we are truly interested in broadening our membership . . . whether we are truly committed to serving low-income persons and minority groups . . . or whether we are to remain a white and middle class organization.

What Low-income Groups Say About Us

It should come as no surprise that low-income persons do not have an overly positive impression of the middle class. They say that for the most part we seem not to be talking to them, but to ourselves — that we are not really concerned about their problems. If we **were**, they say, we would **do** something. We would not sit around eating cookies and talking about the places we've been, and the things we've done, and the schools our children are attending. We plan, they say, but never quite do . . .

"I don't need anybody to help me suffer," is the way one spokesman for the poor put it. And: "If you aren't doing anything for anyone, nobody wants you. . ."

We must come to understand that the people we're seeking to help — and involve — do not come from a distant planet, only a less comfortable part of this one. They have different life styles, not dif-

ferent values. They want the same things we want for their homes, their children and their community. But — when you're on the poverty treadmill, it's hard to keep walking, and harder still to get off. . . .

Gearing for Action

We must convince our ARC membership that although we have always "reached out" to help, the problem here is that the **manner** in which we traditionally reach out is not necessarily the proper way to reach low-income families. Once we understand this, and have truly committed ourselves, we are on the right track.

Where do we go from here? We know about the "general" problems of poverty and mental retardation. Our next step must be to discover the specific needs of our own communities. Each community will, in a sense, be like every other. There will be poverty, disease, hunger and mental retardation in varying degrees. But each will also have individual problems and needs. Only the local unit concerned can properly measure its community's needs, plan to fulfill those needs — and act upon them.

III. Beginning . . .

The first stage in meeting local goals, then, should be an evaluation of local needs. What's happening in your community? What's been done? What's being done **now**? And — equally important — **what do the residents of your low-income community think** is being done? Listen carefully to the needs of the clients concerned — as they see them, not as the agency that has been providing services may see them.

Many local units have already engaged in a community assessment program. Their findings, and the techniques of other concerned agencies, can be most beneficial to ARCs that still face this task.

Perhaps the most thorough method of evaluating the community is to work from the general to the specific. What is the population of your poverty community? What minorities are involved? What mental retardation facilities and services are now available? What is the average income of the low-income family? How many children? What is the local employment situation? What educational facilities, clinics, hospitals are available? These, and many other questions can be answered through inquiries from such agencies and organizations as the public library, social service agencies, hospitals, clinics and schools.

Each ARC should develop a workable method of assessing its local city government, and that government's involvement and interest in working with low-income, mentally retarded and minority groups.

Certainly, a unit must fairly assess its own services, accomplishments and shortcomings:

- How have the low-income mentally retarded been served by our ARC in the past?
- What efforts have we made to improve those services?

Every effort should be made to communicate with all relevant groups, organizations and individuals who might assist in completing your assessment of the community. Exchange views with local representatives of such community action program groups as the Urban League, N.A.A.C.P., Bureau of Indian Affairs, Chicano Awareness Centers, and others such as State Departments of Public Welfare, Planned Parenthood Agencies and maternal and child health facilities.

Establish rapport with local hospitals, mental health and mental retardation centers — particularly those which directly serve low-income areas. Seek help and advice from professionals skilled in community organization and planning. Again — seek and accept the help of the low-income and minority persons you will be working with and serving. They have a meaningful contribution to make, and should be asked to involve themselves in those matters concerning their own welfare.

What to Look For . . .

It isn't enough to establish the existence of agencies that serve the mentally retarded either directly or indirectly. More important is the need to establish the degree and quality of services being offered.

- Are these services meeting the needs of the mentally retarded and their families?
- Have cut-backs in public funding, lessening of support from volunteer groups, or tightening of foundation financing taken their toll?
- Do the agencies and organizations concerned appear to fully understand that mental retardation is just one aspect of the poverty problem? That it is important not to overlook or screen out cases which do not, on the surface, **appear** to relate directly to mental retardation?

An assessment of the needs of your community is the first step toward exercising the ARC's total commitment to the poverty and mental retardation problem. The wants, needs and shortcomings can then be weighed against the positive services being rendered, to form the basis of your action program involvement of the poor. The agencies and organizations that you contact and assess during your community evaluation will, in many cases, be groups that will play a large part in helping your ARC achieve its goals. Your membership has, then, taken more than one step toward gearing for action.

IV. Reaching the Low-income Family

Understanding the Low-Income Family — Some Facts to Remember

Although the life styles of low-income families are different, they have the same motivation, needs and desires as people with higher incomes. People do not want to have low-incomes — they do not relish poverty, hunger and disease. While it would seem unnecessary to make such a point, there is a valid reason for doing so. ARC members, familiar with the many misconceptions attached to the mentally retarded over the years, will not be surprised that low-income persons have also been neatly categorized and labeled. As NARC Executive Director Dr. Philip Roos told the National Poverty Conference in February of 1973:

"One of the several obstacles in working with poor people is that we have developed destructive stereotypes of the poor, kin somewhat to the destructive models of mental retardation. . . . Some of us tend to see the poor as a threat or a menace. We tend to equate poverty with crime. Others tend to see the poor as deviants who are strange, unreachable creatures whose very language is difficult to understand. Some of us, perhaps quite unconsciously, view the poor as subhuman organisms, or people who fail to conform to our own cherished cultural values. Some of us think of the poor as ill, as maladjusted, as shiftless — again paralleling very closely our distorted models of the mentally retarded. These models will generate self-fulfilling prophecies which effectively prevent us from working successfully with poor persons. . . ."

Dr. Roos also stated:

"Poverty is sometimes perceived as the product of evil or as the result of a weakness in character structure. . . . There is also the tendency to equate poverty with stupidity and with poor decision-making. So that we are reluctant to allow the poor to develop self determination, to make decisions directing their own destiny . . ."

Clearly, until we set our prejudices and misconceptions aside — by getting to know low-income persons — we will not be able to understand their feelings, attitudes and needs. And until we **do** understand those needs, we will not be able to properly work with or involve them in the ARC movement. It is vital here that we make a distinction between what the low-income person wants and needs, **and what we think they want or need, or ought to have.** Often, well-meaning agencies and organizations oriented to the middle class and professional group have found themselves trapped in attempting to comprehend and adapt to subcultural variations. The results have, in many cases, been disappointing. As one writer put it, "Understanding the low-income person is easy. They live by priorities, and those priorities are: (1) something to eat this week, and (2) take care of other needs . . ."

It's a simplification, of course, but basically accurate. Low-income families **do** have very real and urgent priorities. For the most part, these priorities center upon survival. They are uninterested in lofty, nebulous ideas that seem to contain little more than vague, empty rhetoric. As the helping agency, it will be necessary to modify many of **our** preconceived priorities — if we are to earn the respect and trust of the low-income person.

Low-income Statistics

People are not statistics, but statistics **can** reflect certain aspects of the people concerned. The 1973 established federal guidelines state that:

A family of four making less than $4,200 per year is "officially" considered as poor. That means $350 per month to provide food, clothing, shelter and medical care for four people. — And that "official" figure **is the upper limit for poverty. Many, many families exist on far less than that.** For example: the average welfare family — consisting of a mother and three young children — receives only $115.78 per month. That's a little over $28 per person. . . .

Such figures clearly point out the fact that the people we are committed to help and involve are—necessarily—primarily motivated by a very basic principle: survival. Their world is restricted by economic and social limitations, because the Poverty Cycle does not allow for broad areas of "choice." Thus, the things people in low-income areas do, the places they go and the people they see are all closely tied to the everpresent need to "make it from one day to the next." If we want to meet and understand low-income families we must meet them where they live. If we are going to get to know them, we are going to have to get to know them through the people **they** know, not through the people we know. We will find ourselves moving into unfamiliar realms—talking to people who have different backgrounds, different needs and decidedly different priorities. We will, though, find that we are talking to people who have a great deal in common with us all—they have moments of sadness and moments of joy, days of pleasure and days of pain—and, always, dreams of tomorrow.

Meeting Low-income Families Where They Live

Obviously, reaching low-income families requires far different methods than have traditionally been utilized in reaching middle and upper income groups. As we've seen, in many cases, low-income families are unaware that we exist—and if they do know we're around, they may well have little faith in our abilities to deliver. The credibility gap which exists between the "helping professions" and low-income and minority groups is well known. If we are to reach the low-income person this gap **must** be bridged. We must prove to low-income families that they will not be treated merely as objects of sociological interest.

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We must, then, meet the people where they live, through the people they know and trust. There are a number of people and places which will serve as valuable contact points: churches, schools, barber shops, beauty shops, recreation areas (including the pool hall and the street corner), politicians, local leaders of indigenous groups, and other individuals already familiar with—and trusted by—low-income persons.

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1. **The Church.** Often in low-income communities the church is a focal point for poverty area residents. The church might be the "store front" variety from your point of view—but it **is** a church, and there are people inside. People with problems and needs. They might be gathered to worship on a Thursday night, or on a Sunday. At times, the church may serve as a place of worship, and at other times it will be a gathering point for social activities, meetings or simply as a place to get together and talk. It's an area that can and should be utilized, because the church is **making direct contact with the people we are trying to serve and involve.**

The Black minister, the parish priest and the neighborhood preacher perform services far beyond the religious needs of their congregations. They know who is sick, who needs a job, who's in trouble with the law, and who has a mentally retarded child.

2. **Schools.** Again, the school in low-income areas serves as more than an educational institution. The teacher could be used as a resource to inform parents about the ARC. For example: STAR* discovered that 56% of the families in its survey first learned about their child's retardation from the teacher. Additionally, 51% of the parents reporting stated the child's teacher or counselor was the person they contacted for assistance in getting help for their child.

3. **Physicians, Nurses, Clinics.** While medical services in low-income areas are, in many cases, inadequate to fully serve the needs of the population, personnel engaged in these activities often have a broad picture of the overall health problems of the community. You and your ARC can serve a dual purpose here. You can utilize local medical facilities and personnel as contact points, and, at the same time, gain the opportunity to evaluate—and help—increase their awareness of the needs of the mentally retarded.

4. **Recreation Areas.** It's quite likely that ARC members will discover new definitions for "recreation" when they begin to familiarize themselves with low-income areas. There will sometimes be YMCA and YWCA facilities available, and other organized activities such as Police Athletic Leagues and neighborhood groups sponsored by indigenous or outside agencies. However, you will also find a great deal of unorganized or partially organized activity. The drug store, pool hall, neighborhood bar, street corner, vacant lot, abandoned building and rooftop also serve as recreational areas for the low-income person. Again, personnel who serve as official or unofficial leaders of activity groups may be helpful as community contacts.

**Serving to Advance Rehabilitation. A research and demonstration project sponsored by the National Urban League, Family Service Association of America and NARC.*

5. **Other Agencies and Individuals.** Hopefully, some social service agencies or individuals have already gained the confidence of low-income families by proving their interest and sincerity through action. Certainly, such groups or persons should be utilized by the ARC. It's quite likely that useful contacts in this area will have already been established through the ARC's earlier survey and evaluation of the low-income community.

Bridgers—Closing the Gap

It would be impossible to list all of the groups or individuals that could prove helpful in reaching the low-income family. Public health nurses, politicians, leaders of local groups or clubs, teachers, merchants, newspapers, etc. are just a beginning. Most importantly, however, is that the ARC, during this stage of its involvement, use knowledge, intuition and good judgment in utilizing those people **who truly know the poor and have gained their confidence and trust.**

We have established the fact that, in the beginning we must depend upon those who know low-income persons and have earned their confidence. The "bridger" will become an important person in the ARC's work in the low-income community. He or she is a person who understands what the ARC has to offer, and what low-income families want and need.

After contact has been established with the agencies and individuals who will serve as bridgers, there are a number of other resources that can be utilized to further reach the low-income person. The bridger can help you establish and use the proper publicity outlets to inform the community regarding meetings which may be held, services offered, or projects initiated in the neighborhood. There are usually a great many appropriate outlets which can be of service, including newspapers, politicians, churches, minority radio stations, storefronts, and many more. The use of communications media **can** be an effective means of reaching low-income persons. Often, we do not fully utilize such resources, although there are many public information programs that frequently reach the low-income person—special programs or stations directed toward a particular target population. For example, Spanish and Black radio stations and local community newspapers. The existing "grapevine" media, strategically placed posters, displays and announcements may also prove helpful. Newsletters, if used, should be in the language spoken in the area—they should contain specific, timely items of interest to low-income persons. They should be easy to read and understand. If photographs are used, they should depict representatives or scenes from the minority group or poverty area in question—not stereotyped middle class pictures which have little or nothing to do with the readers' lives. These suggestions, of course, apply to both the initial and later stages of your ARC's involvement.

Working With Low-income Families

Bridgers will help alleviate the fears and suspicions which will very likely be initial reactions to outside attempts at help and involvement. Bridgers, however, can only do so much. It is **the responsibility of the ARC membership** to offer its services and explain its purpose. And, as we've discussed, there is a right way and a wrong way to establish a good, mutually trusting relationship with the low-income person. **Ask**—don't **tell.** Don't inform low-income families of the many fine plans you have for their betterment. Listen, and let **them** tell **you** what they need. You know the problems and needs of the mentally retarded. But they know how it is to be of low income.

If you expect them to respect your knowledge, they can expect no less from you. Listen to what they feel mental retardation in the family means—how it affects their lives, their finances, their attitudes toward life. Listen, and learn, what it means to be low-incomed, hungry, ill-housed, out of work—and the parents of a mentally retarded child. Find out what they think of the job you and others are doing for them—or what they feel you **should** be doing.

Co-operate — don't patronize.
Assist — don't demand.
Help — don't give.

Effective Involvement—"We Mean What We Say"

Earlier we discussed the problem of involving low-income persons in the work of the ARC. It was suggested that before we can realistically expect low-income persons to become involved in the ARC movement, we must demonstrate our own involvement in the poverty area—our sincerity and our effectiveness. How can we show low-income persons that we mean what we say? The answer is that we must **do,** not say. **Show,** not tell. We must, in

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essence, demonstrate our effectiveness. First, we must prove ourselves to low-income persons. **Then** we'll make them members . . .

How can we best show the low-income person what can be done? This outline only briefly covers major points, but it offers a guideline for action. Various aspects of the plan discussed here will be enlarged upon in later sections.

1. Through bridgers, and ARC involvement, gather a "core" group of poverty area persons interested in the problems of poverty and mental retardation.
2. Discover a particular, well-defined need—as seen and discussed by the participants themselves.
3. Satisfy that need through cooperative work efforts between ARC members and the poverty area "core" group.
4. Through solution of the problem, low-income representatives will see that through ARC aid, and their own involvement, a need has been met.

Methods of Organization

Project STAR and other agencies that have worked with low-income families have discovered that certain methods of organizing low-income area families are more effective than others. It appears that the most workable method for a "beginning" low-income group is **an informally organized gathering of interested parents.** The parent discussion group is designed to bring together a relatively small group of parents for a series of meetings to exchange experiences and recommend solutions. The exchange provides a means of identifying and assessing those family and community issues and concerns common to the group. Parents can, at the same time, receive orientation in mental retardation, clarification of the operations and services of community agencies such as the local ARC, and begin to grasp the most immediate needs of their particular group.

It is important to emphasize, however, that while these groups want and appreciate information on mental retardation, and help in gaining more appropriate services in that area, **they are primarily concerned with immediate needs.** This is symptomatic of the poverty cycle—there is generally little time for long-term, speculative projections among low-income persons. Although they are just as concerned about the future as members of the middle class, life demands quick solutions to everyday, basic problems such as food and clothing.

Demonstrating Effectiveness

What type of project will best demonstrate the sincerity and effectiveness of the ARC, and at the same time fulfill a need for the family discussion group? The particular project, of course, is dependent upon the group concerned. It should, however, be one **that is directly related to an immediate need.** Nebulous solutions and vague results will do little to either endear the ARC to low-income persons or help low-income families with their problems. Low-income persons deal daily with the concrete. The abstract has the lowest of priorities.

The project could concern health, education, housing, employment, recreation, a service or program for the mentally retarded, a "break-through" in obtaining a service not available before—anything that will meet an immediate need.

In some cases, many of the needs of the low-income community can be met through improving existing, but presently "unavailable" community services. This is true where community organization, advocacy and parent education techniques are especially applicable. Such techniques are useful in cases where the services are **not** located in the low-income and minority communities, the service agencies are **not** involved with this population, or the population itself is unaware of the existence of the service. Such programs can provide an important bridge between parents, children and the needed services.

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Additional Project Possibilities

1. Offer support and technical assistance to existing community programs and local neighborhood groups.
2. Participate in jointly sponsored programs with local "indigenous" groups or agencies. Such programs help bring professional and volunteer personnel and members of the minority and low-income community together in a cooperative shared responsibility, and ensures the right of low-income persons to participate in the development, sanction and implementation of policy.
3. In conjunction with the family discussion group's project, sponsor community seminars on

mental retardation. Some of the findings of Project STAR and other demonstration projects indicate that low-income persons are generally uninformed and possess little knowledge of mental retardation, its causes or the resources available to help those handicapped in the community.

4. Project involvement in issues affecting the community: the ARC units attempting to relate and provide services for the mentally retarded cannot divorce themselves from participation and support of the low-income families in issues affecting their survival—and still expect to be received and accepted with enthusiasm among minorities and low-income individuals. As previously suggested, your "core" family discussion group may well choose a community need project that has little direct bearing upon the problem of mental retardation.

5. The early ARC concept of parent-to-parent counseling and assistance could be utilized as an integral part of the initial project. Such a relationship, based upon experiences in common, would serve to help bridge the cultural social-economic barriers between ARC members and residents of poverty neighborhoods.

When helping to develop a family discussion group project, it is important that the ARC remember the need for positive results, Additionally, those services that the ARC **has** to offer should be offered **now**. Some services that have helped to provide a meaningful contact with the poor are (a) serving as an information and referral point, (b) respite care, (c) home aides, (d) child care assistance, (e) transportation, (f) emergency food supplies, and (g) medical information and referrals.

And From **That** Beginning . . . . .

RESULTS
+
A COMMON MEETING GROUND
+
MUTUAL INVOLVEMENT = TRUST,

WHICH CAN LEAD TO MEMBERSHIP FOR REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY . . .

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V. Involvement: The Direct Road to ARC Membership

Problems—and Answers

The local unit has organized family discussion "core" groups, and has successfully carried out demonstration projects. Now, many barriers to membership for the low-income family have been removed. There will be problems, certainly, but the experienced ARC membership will be in a better position to handle them.

What **are** the problems that will be encountered in integrating low-income persons into the ARC movement? In an earlier section, we discussed the fact that different social, cultural and economic backgrounds—plus different needs and priorities—have caused misconceptions, fears and misunderstandings between low-income persons and the middle-class. Hopefully, prior contact and involvement between the ARC membership and prospective low-income members will have alleviated many of these problems. The importance of "laying foundations" cannot be overemphasized. Many local ARCs have learned, through experience, that recruiting low-income and minority members involves a great deal more than "signing 'em up, sending 'em a newsletter, and sticking 'em on a committee." The tried and true membership techniques simply don't work here. We **do** know, however, what **does** work: **a demonstration of sincerity through action.**

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Involving low-income families in the ARC

Low-income members will have to make many adjustments to you—and there should be a willingness on your part to adjust to them. More than likely, there will be appropriate changes in policies, practices and attitudes. No one, of course, expects the ARC to overturn or abandon all of its organizational and operational practices—only that it make adjustments to include low-income families. Time, and understanding between all persons concerned will strengthen the local unit, and enable it to better fulfill its goals.

NARC, as one of the sponsoring agencies of Project STAR, recognized the need to further involve low-income families and actively sought the counsel of representatives of minority groups and persons with experience in working with low-income individuals. These contributions by Amalia Guerro, President of EL ARCA and Mary Hammond, Associate Director, EL ARCA, should prove helpful to ARC units:

"We present here for your consideration, several factors which we think are significant and have proven important in the necessary extension of local units to involve low-income persons in the ARC.

1. "Your chapter must want to include new members and low-income families. The style of contribution the low-income members will offer may be different from the usual style. Try to see new members as individuals rather than the 'low-income group.'

2. "Try to look at the ARC from the position of a newcomer. Try to explain the work of the ARC as much as possible on a one-to-one basis. It would help if a push for new young parents was made at the same time low-income persons are being recruited. This will help you avoid a situation of having just low-income members to orientate to the ARC.

"A newly elected parent to a special committee or board may appear at a meeting with a friend. It's probably their means of transportation and moral support. Welcome the friend, but realize that they will not expect to participate.

3. "Parent organizations are becoming rather sophisticated structures. It will take time and patience for a low-income parent to adjust to the gap between 'committees and bylaws' and the 'step to action.'

4. "There will be problems which we tend to overlook. Transportation and babysitting will frequently be a problem for your new members. We would suggest a phone call offering to pick up the new member.

"Some parents will appear with their children for general meetings. This is acceptable in many chapters. When you decide how to handle this, we hope that you would not automatically exclude children and/or retarded individuals, but would consider alternative plans.

5. "People respond to people warmly. Lack of personal warmth will discourage any new members regardless of economic background.

6. "There are some general expectations that need to be avoided when the low-income and/or minority parents are brought into the ARC . . . to do so, you must get to know your new members, find out their special interests and how they can be best utilized. Do not overwhelm new members with, 'what can you do?'

7. "Language differences are a definite problem for the Spanish speaking. You will find that there are enough Spanish speaking in many areas to warrant simultaneous translation of your meetings. This is very time consuming, but has proven to be extremely effective and essential to some groups.

8. "A real problem inhibiting a significant group of low-income parents is the financial aspect and its ramifications. Organizational dues mean very little to a low-income person, unless concrete feedback is felt.

9. "If a particular family does not seem to respond to notices or telephone calls, try a visit to their home. They will be more at ease and perhaps feel that you can better understand their situation. We would recommend home visits for all newcomers, but we realize that most chapters will consider that impossible."

The ARC Meeting

It's important to note some further important points regarding new low-income members. As Project STAR reported, membership for individuals of low-income **must** be meaningful and comfortable if these persons are to maintain their interest and involvement. Many ARC members feel that their meetings are sometimes overly formal. Certainly, low-income persons would agree. Rigid and complicated parliamentary procedure may be unfamiliar to the low-income person and inhibits free and natural participation. As many ARC members can attest, rules of order can become ritualistic and laborious, when the importance of "proper procedure" surpasses the need to get things done. Some suggested modifications in ARC meetings and activities may be helpful in this respect:

1. Robert's Rules of Order could be modified somewhat to avoid many unnecessary complexities...

2. Non-essential and detailed "business" might be handled in separate but open sessions . . .

3. An effort should be made to regularly include programs relevant to the issues of poverty . . .

4. Remember: new members — low-income or otherwise—are not familiar with ongoing ARC programs and issues. They do not share your accumu-

lated knowledge of policies, practices and activities of national, state and local ARCs. Additionally, overuse of abbreviations, acronyms and unfamiliar terms automatically exclude newcomers—unless they are provided with adequate background information.

A few additional rule-of-thumb suggestions that will make your new members feel welcome:

1. Low-income members will appreciate meaningful participation and "active" programs. While it is often necessary and important to discuss and plan for the future, such plans should be expressed and carried forward as real, concrete projects—not as vague generalities for tomorrow . . .

2. Prejudice should be dealt with—not avoided. However, it is possible to go overboard in the other direction. Fear of offending low-income persons and minorities can inhibit efforts toward communication, friendship and involvement . . .

3. Consider the problems of low-income persons regarding their attendance at meetings. (Remember, your "off hours" are not necessarily the same as theirs.) . . .

4. Involving low-income persons on boards, advisory committees or other groups is useless and destructive unless such persons are given the proper orientation to enable them to perform their tasks and contribute to the group. Mere "appointments" to such positions neither impress low-income persons with your competence, nor help solve the problems of poverty and mental retardation . . .

Suggested Methods of Furthering Involvement

Programs for membership meetings which would interest the low-income family.

a. Ways to deal with agencies (social, governmental, etc.)

b. Home management problems.

c. Information on available programs and services in the community.

d. Innovative activities such as picnics, barbeques, retreats, etc., should be planned on a regular basis.

Assignments that new members might become involved in: (Suggest and assist individuals to serve as Block or Community coordinators to serve on ARC committees to advise on community needs that could be met by volunteers.) Also, they could learn more about and work with: homemaker services; parent helper programs; fatherless boy programs; car pools and other methods of transportation, e.g., bus tickets and cab pools; babysitter projects; language barrier problems; recruitment and organization of youth volunteers for community schools to promote programs for the mentally retarded; recreational needs; coordination with groups and organizations already working with the mentally retarded—and contact with groups that **could** provide services.

Alternate Organizational Models

Due to varying circumstances, the ARC may wish to consider the possibility and practicality of helping establish independent or satellite units in low-income neighborhoods, rather than integrating the poor into existing units. It might be, in some cases that the poor themselves will feel this is a more workable, beneficial, solution. Certainly, the ultimate decision should be theirs.

There are several reasons why such alternate models might be considered:

1. While the cultural, social and economic barriers between the low-income and middle classes are by no means insurmountable, there are acknowledged difficulties in involving low-income individuals in ARC units as they are currently defined. However, the decision to form an alternate group should be based upon positive aspects of such an organization, rather than the desire to "avoid problems."

2. Hopefully, an independent or satellite ARC would be formed from members of parent discussion groups, neighborhood organizations, advisory bodies for mental retardation facilities, etc.—or others that have been involved in demonstration projects with the ARC, **and are in a good position to form the core or nucleus of an ARC-type unit.** Such persons now somewhat familiar with ARC goals through personal involvement—would provide valuable leadership for a low-income area ARC. Thus, aid to residents of the poverty area could be greatly facilitated.

3. As such satellite or independent units saw and defined needs, their "associate" ARC could respond to those needs with appropriate help, technical service and professional assistance. The new unit would provide a much-needed link between the wide gulf of fears, cynicism and misconceptions that exist between the low-income person and the more affluent.

While the ARC unit may wish to attempt to immediately recruit low-income members into its organization, they may also wish to consider the fact that experience indicates there **are** feasible alternatives. Involvement of ARC members and "core" groups in demonstration projects can form the basis of a good working relationship, and the beginning of valuable independent or associate units in low-income neighborhoods. **By working together prior to the "membership stage,"** ARC and low-income representatives can "break the ice" and proceed to closer relationships—and greater service to the low-income mentally retarded.

The Low-income Family in Rural Areas

If we are to conquer the problem of rural poverty, we must first change our traditional view of rural

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America. We must broaden and restructure rural facilities and services, and gain a better understanding of how the needs of the rural poor relate to their counterparts in the city.

We must now define the community in terms of areas that include several counties grouped about a town, city or metropolis. Sub areas in this unit will include those persons who share common economic and social interests. Geographic boundaries **must be determined by needs**—not by city, county or state political jurisdictions. The rural society we have known for the past century is no longer feasible. The world has grown more complicated, more interdependent. Increasing complexities have caused very difficult problems for the rural poor. They have tried to keep up with the technological tide—and failed. Many have been disillusioned in their efforts to find jobs in the city outside their traditional fields of agriculture, mining, etc. The problem of identifying and helping the rural poor becomes more difficult, then—it is no longer possible to simply "drive to the country" to find those persons affected by rural poverty.

Low-income Participation and ARC involvement.

As the dimensions of the community have changed, so also has the responsibility of the individual citizen. More than ever, his knowledge and advice are needed in the planning and decision-making that occurs at the areawide level. It is also his responsibility to see that others are afforded the opportunity to exercise those basic rights of citizenship that he may take for granted. For instance, low-income persons are frequently denied the opportunity to vote, and are seldom encouraged to exercise this right. **Fulfillment of this right is basic to any effort at community organization.** All barriers to true citizenship—legal, informational, institutional and economic—must be eliminated.

The ARC can help draw the low-income person closer to the governmental process. Techniques can be developed to bring major issues before the people and, in turn, to accurately convey the people's judgment back to our public servants. While the government has an obligation to reflect the views and the needs of all the people, this obligation is not always fully honored. Elected officials at every level must give increased attention to improving communication between themselves and the people they represent.

Low-income citizens can be of invaluable help in both problem identification and the planning process. Being close to the particular problem, they often see implications that might otherwise be ignored. Additionally, local poverty leaders can provide an essential communications link between the low-income person and the community at large—

where the real decisions are generally made.

Citizen involvement can only begin at the "people" level. To reach the rural poor, we must go to the shantytowns, the hollows and the isolated communities where they live. The ARC can do a great deal to strengthen communications between the rural poor and the remainder of society. Certainly, if programs are to reach the people for whom they are intended, this barrier must be breached. The most effective programs will result from a careful melding of the views of those experiencing the problems and those who have the authority and responsibility of program planning and implementation.

Organizations within the "living area" can help local people accomplish specific goals. The construction of vocational centers, "living area" beautification and the building of neighborhood centers are examples of projects that are practicable for local action. In addition, we must seek to involve and integrate the mentally retarded, when possible, in existing services.

Involving the low-income persons in activities of this nature will help to give them a sense of belonging and responsibility. Low-income persons are lacking more than material goods. Feelings of helplessness and insecurity are prevalent. By giving low-income individuals a voice in local projects, we can help improve their outlook on life and their ability to gain some control over their own destinies.

Organizations within the "living area" can also be a resource for conducting educational programs to assist low-income families. Adult education in homemaking, health care, family planning, literacy and vocational skills is needed. Through proper help, **we can begin to meet these needs.**

Organizations can lay the groundwork for representation of the poor at the higher, decision-making levels of government. Most major community interests are represented in the political process, often through several groups. Low-income persons are an obvious exception.

These are a few of the tasks the ARC can accomplish through organization at the "living area" level, and through mobilization of local resources. Still, we must not forget that many issues vital to low-income families are **not** decided locally; many of the resources required to combat poverty are **not** available. If citizen participation is to achieve its fullest potential, it must be extended to the larger community as well.

There are, of course, needs and problems within the rural low-income areas which differ somewhat from those in urban locations. However, it should be remembered that the basic principles discussed in these Guidelines are, in the main, applicable to both urban and rural poverty needs.

VI. Youth — Helping to Bridge the Gap

The value of Youthful Participation

Youth ARC members have shown their willingness and ability to work effectively in the areas discussed in these guidelines. Additionally, there are a great many fields in which young people have special talents and capabilities. They have already proven that they can bridge gaps. They can often open doors in areas where an adult is not yet welcome. There are a great many ARC youth groups across the country already working with the mentally retarded. Most of these groups are presently involved in direct service programs in their areas. Many of our Youth groups have already appointed poverty committees on both state and local levels—realizing the high incidence of mental retardation in low-income areas.

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There are a number of ways in which young people can be valuable in working on projects in low-income areas:

Public information and distribution of materials telling the story of poverty and mental retardation are vital factors in reaching our goals. Youth organizations have proven their worth in this area. It's important to note that while more and more information is being made available to the public, such data is useless unless it reaches the proper audience.

Materials are available from ARC units on national, state and local levels, State departments of public welfare and child care, the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, and various other sources. Effective campaigns—involving the distribution of materials by young people—can be coordinated by the ARC in its efforts to inform the poverty community of upcoming meetings, special events, etc. Youth groups can also be enlisted to distribute educational and informational data of special interest to low-income families.

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Youth ARC members can also be helpful in locating low-income families. Young people come in contact with other young people. And since they do not ordinarily let racial or cultural barriers stand in their way, they frequently have friends among low-income persons and minority groups. Many young people from all walks of life are already involved in youth ARC organizations. Thus, young people are, in many respects, currently practicing those activities which may still be in the future for most adult ARC members.

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Youth ARC members are experienced in planning and implementing recreational activities for the mentally retarded. This experience will prove helpful in expanding programs and activities toward total family involvement.

One of the reasons parents—regardless of income—sometimes fail to attend ARC meetings, is the unavailability of babysitters. Local Youth ARC units all across the country have successfully set up babysitting and respite care programs which have proven invaluable.

As mentioned, many Youth ARC units have devised and implemented projects specifically geared to the low-income area. Such projects include lead paint surveys and the preparation of lead paint informational data, providing transportation, contacting community agencies to encourage them to make themselves more readily available to low-income persons, the preparation of "Health Fairs," etc.

Suggested Youth ARC Projects

1. Each state ARC Poverty Committee should appoint a Youth representative to serve on that committee. The State Youth ARC can encourage his membership to follow through on the local level.

2. ARC units should remember that Youth groups can be very instrumental in working on projects in poverty and mental retardation. They should be actively supported in their projects in this area, though aid and assistance from the ARC.

Each youth ARC unit can increase its impact in the poverty area through:

a. seeking to work harmoniously with the ARC unit in their area.

b. contacting the local and state ARC and asking them to appoint a Youth representative to their poverty committee.

c. using their abilities to develop programs which will point out the relationship between poverty and mental retardation.

d. making a special effort to include poverty area representatives in their programs.

e. Make poverty and mental retardation a top priority.

f. Obtain information that will help to educate Youth members in the subjects of poverty and mental retardation. Be sure to include this topic in orientation programs for new members.

VII. The ARC as a Catalyst—Letting Other People Know

Broadening Existing Services

ARC members have long recognized the fact that retarded children and adults can only obtain maximum benefit from community, state and national

agencies—both public and private—**if those agencies are fully aware of the needs of the mentally retarded.**

"Obtain, not provide" is the key here. The ARC has been successful in serving as a catalyst to broaden existing services. Our experiences should serve us well in working with the low-income mentally retarded. Certainly, we can be useful in this area—while services have been obtained for hundreds of thousands of mentally retarded persons, **there are many, many persons in the poverty community who are receiving** virtually **no** services. The ARC may want to start a new program and later spin it off to a community agency. This, of course, will have to be a prearranged contract.

Our responsibility, then, is to broaden our concern: to obtain, through existing agencies, services for the low-income mentally retarded. This can be accomplished in two ways: (1) by working with those agencies that have helped us in the past, and (2) by making new contacts with agencies whose primary concern is in the low-income area.

We should encourage the first group to examine and expand their programs to assure that low-income mentally retarded have not been turned away, screened out or ignored. (Public and private schools, public and private recreational groups, family service agencies, vocational rehabilitation agencies, health and mental health organizations, etc.)

The second group, those agencies which operate primarily in poverty areas, may require a somewhat different approach. These agencies, which deal with the **multiple** problems of low-income persons, may be unaware of the high incidence of mental retardation among their clients. They may be unaware of the existing community services **which could be utilized** by the mentally retarded. The ARC can help bridge this "knowledge gap" by informing public and private welfare agencies, community action groups, community centers and Head Start programs of the known facts about the relationship between mental retardation and poverty. The ARC can work with these agencies in developing procedures for identifying mentally retarded children and adults, and can provide them with information about existing services. Additionally, the ARC can act as a resource for agencies in supplying further information and referral services.

ARSs have long accepted the challenge—and the responsibility—of obtaining comprehensive, high quality services for **all** the mentally retarded. By expanding our vital role as a catalyst into poverty areas, we can help to bring our communities, states and our nation closer to realization of our goals.

Extending Beneficial Legislation

Certainly, one of the most vital activities of the ARC movement over the years has been in the area of legislation affecting the mentally retarded. Our efforts in this field become doubly meaningful in the light of our increased involvement with the low-income mentally retarded.

As discussed earlier, we cannot treat mental retardation as an isolated problem. We cannot—and should not—separate it from the greater problem of poverty. It is important, then, to extend our efforts toward gaining beneficial legislation affecting low-income persons. In the long run, State and Federal rulings in the areas of housing, education, welfare, social services, etc., will have a telling effect upon a great many mentally retarded persons. Examples of areas of concern include the new Head Start regulations which became effective in October of 1972, Supplemental Security Income, January 1974 and other current legislation affecting low-income and handicapped persons.

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In Summary

In many respects, the National Poverty Conference served as a turning point in the growth of our movement. We held a mirror to our Association, and asked ourselves some penetrating questions:

Where have we been? And where are we going?

In all honesty, we could say that over the years we have made deep and lasting inroads into the problems of mental retardation. We have learned, too, that while we have not yet met the needs of the low-income mentally retarded, our experience **has** prepared us to accept this challenge.

The purpose of these Guidelines is two-fold: to aid local ARC units across the country to (1) help low-income families break the cycle of poverty and (2) actively involve them in the ARC movement.

To summarize some of the key points of this publication:

1. There is a disproportionately high incidence of mental retardation among low-income groups. A child from a low-income family is 15 times more likely to be diagnosed as retarded than a child from a higher income family.

2. Although genetically transmitted types of retardation **are** found among low income persons, retardation associated with environmental hazards, inadequate health care and congenital disorders among this group greatly exceeds the average for all other socioeconomic groups.

3. Malnutrition, poor medical care, lead poisoning, etc. are a few of these environmental hazards. Isolation and cultural deprivation are additional aspects of the problem.

4. **Most importantly, we have learned that mental retardation is** only one aspect of the greater problem of poverty. We have learned that we cannot isolate mental retardation—or attack it—without attacking the problem of the poverty cycle.

5. Traditional methods of enlisting prospective ARC members are not suitable for use in poverty areas. We must, first, learn more about life styles, needs and cultural backgrounds of low-income persons.

6. Before we can convince low-income persons that their participation in the Association will be beneficial to both themselves and the ARC, we must first **prove** to them that the ARC itself is a worthwhile, sincere organization.

7. We must, then, be prepared to totally commit ourselves to serving **all** mentally retarded persons in the community.

8. In working with low-income persons, we must overcome some long-established misconceptions and prejudices about the poor. Additionally, we must understand that low-income persons do not have an overly positive impression of the middle

class. There is a great deal of distrust regarding the motives of middle-class organizations and agencies.

9. To properly begin our fight against poverty and mental retardation, ARC units should evaluate existing community services and needs. What's being done? What **needs** to be done? We should not only assess the effectiveness of other community organizations and agencies, we should honestly evaluate our own efforts.

10. To understand low-income persons we must realize that **they have different life styles, but have the same motivation, needs and desires as people with higher incomes.** We must learn to overcome destructive stereotypes, misconceptions and generalities associated with low-income persons.

11. To successfully involve low-income families, ARC units will have to meet low-income families where they live. We can best meet the low-income family through organizations, individuals and agencies already established and trusted in low-income communities. Churches, schools, clinics and recreation areas are a few good choices.

12. Such individuals or groups can serve as vital "bridgers" in meeting and involving low-income persons. However, it is the responsibility of the ARC itself to offer its services and explain its purposes.

13. The key to involvement with low-income families lies in effectively demonstrating our effectiveness. We must **do**, not say. **Show**, not tell.

14. Through "bridgers," and ARC involvement, we can gather a "core" parent discussion group of low-income area residents interested in the problems of poverty and mental retardation. Then, we can discover a particular immediate need, and help bring it to fruition. In this way, trust between the ARC unit and low-income residents will be greatly enhanced and strengthened.

15. We must understand that demonstration projects chosen by core groups may not necessarily directly involve mental retardation. Priorities among low-income families are likely to be those which meet immediate survival needs.

16. Results + mutual involvement = trust.—And this leads to membership for representatives from the low-income community.

17. There will be problems to overcome in integrating new members into the ARC: transportation, language barriers, babysitting, cultural differences, etc. All can be overcome through patience and mutual understanding. Some changes in the structure of the ARC meeting will be beneficial in this respect.

18. The ARC, and potential low-income area members, may wish to consider the possibility and practicality of establishing independent or satellite units in low-income areas, rather than integrating into existing units. In some cases, low-income persons may feel this is a more workable, beneficial solution.

19. Youth ARC members have already shown their willingness and ability to work effectively in the low-income area. There are a great many fields in which young people have special talents and capabilities—"bridging," public information, recreation, etc.

20. "Obtain, not provide," has long been a workable ARC maxim. We should continue to serve as a catalyst in helping broaden existing services for the mentally retarded—with new emphasis on the low-income mentally retarded.

21. In this respect, the ARC should also continue its efforts in all areas of legislation affecting the mentally retarded, and low-income groups.

22. Our efforts in the legislative field have become doubly meaningful in the light of the ARCs' involvement with the mentally retarded in low-income areas. We cannot separate the two problems of poverty and mental retardation. State and Federal rulings affecting low-income persons will directly touch the lives of a great many mentally retarded children and adults.

23. Through its involvement, the local ARC can greatly help the mentally retarded in low-income areas. In turn, such efforts will benefit the ARC itself—for as we seek to provide services for others, we will discover that we are also taking giant strides in broadening our own perspective.

Additionally, as we make inroads into the problems of mental retardation among low-income persons, we will discover that we are increasing the overall awareness of these problems—both among the general public, and, specifically, within the poverty community. This new knowledge could serve to help lower the high incidence of mental retardation among low-income persons by increasing awareness of the many preventive measures which can be taken to combat mental retardation.

Also, our work and cooperation in this field will mutually benefit members of the poverty community and the ARC, through the establishment of an additional support system. Additional support will, in turn, enable us to further our work in the area.

As we learned at the National Poverty Conference, the **beginning** of our fight against mental retardation and poverty lies in understanding. When we understand, we can act, and only through action can we meet this challenge. Our association has proven in the past that goals can be turned into tangible results. We can and must do the same again.

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